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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 05 STATE 114035

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FOLLOWING PARIS 004243 DATED 06/20/2006 SENT ACTION
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QUOTE UNCLAS PARIS 004243

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SUBJECT: MISSION FRANCE'S EXPERIENCE WITH THE AMERICAN PRESENCE
POST (APP) CONCEPT

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Summary

¶1. (SBU) American Presence Posts (APP), active in France since 1999, play a key role in this mission's transformational diplomacy efforts. The concept is replicable in other countries, but Missions need to remain flexible as they adapt the APP concept to local conditions. Key factors to consider include mission priorities, host country infrastructure, recruitment, security, and training. The US Mission in France is ready to assist colleagues in Washington and overseas in sharing our experience on APP establishment and management.

Introduction

¶2. (SBU) One-officer American Presence Posts (APPs) have been operating in France since 1999, but the term "APP" became considerably better known with the Secretary's January 18, 2006 transformational diplomacy speech at Georgetown. Embassy Paris and the five APPs in France (Bordeaux, Lille, Lyon, Rennes, and Toulouse) have since been approached by numerous colleagues elsewhere wanting to know more - what exactly is an APP? How do they operate? What factors need to be taken into consideration when deciding whether to establish one? In the spirit of sharing what the US Mission in France has learned over the last seven years, this telegram aims not only to address such questions, but also to offer various resources to colleagues in both Washington and overseas who are considering the viability of an APP elsewhere. The Department may wish to consider broader dissemination of this message to overseas posts.

¶3. (SBU) This telegram focuses on the APPs in France - posts in other countries with different goals and/or considerations (such as different Mission priorities and a different level of host country infrastructure) may choose to handle things differently. We provide specific details in certain sections to illustrate how our APPs function, but an Embassy in another country might very well find that a different model would better serve their needs.

Why an APP?

¶4. (SBU) One of the first questions to consider is whether an APP is the best response to Mission needs. Is a Consulate more appropriate? Is an APP being considered as a downsizing measure, or

a new geographic presence for the Mission? Is a Virtual Presence Post (VPP) or an American Corner more appropriate?

¶5. (SBU) In the case of France, posts with a single American officer (the core of our APP concept) were chosen to meet a perceived need. In the early 1990s, the State Department closed numerous small Western European constituent posts, including the Consulates General in Bordeaux and Lyon, in order to staff new Embassy requirements in the former Soviet republics. By the late 1990s, the Mission felt that the lack of American presence was harming efforts to reach media/opinion leaders and to advance U.S. commercial interests in France's important regional centers.

The Development of France's APP Concept

¶6. (SBU) Budget and personnel resources in the late 1990s were extremely tight, and the Mission chose an approach that utilized only existing Mission personnel resources and involved little/no increase in Mission budget. In addition to a lone American officer, the five APPs in France have between one and four LES employees. All were drawn from existing Mission personnel slots. Resources such as vehicles were also reprogrammed from Paris so that the new APPs did not have to spend large sums of money on equipment and supplies. One positive factor was the difference between the rental cost of apartments in Paris and Lyon (the site of the first APP) -- rental savings were so great that residential rental savings covered almost all of the "new" cost of renting office space in Lyon.

¶7. (SBU) The Mission has worked diligently to maintain a lean agenda for these lean posts -- a fairly strict focus on public diplomacy, commercial advocacy and essential U.S. citizen consular

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services. This effort requires a senior Embassy coordinator, to help ensure that "mission creep" is avoided, particularly in the area of required reporting, official visitor taskings, administrative requirements, etc. In the case of France, the Minister-Counselor for Economic Affairs serves as APP coordinator, in close cooperation with the Front Office, and in regular contact with FCS, PD, Consular and Management.

What the APPs in France Do...And What They Don't Do

¶8. (SBU) The APPs in France are designed to shape outcomes rather than report on them. As mentioned earlier, they have three primary missions: public diplomacy (PD), commercial diplomacy and American citizen services (ACS). Our APPs do little "traditional" political/economic reporting, although officers and local employees occasionally e-mail updates on local events such as regional elections, urban unrest and student protests, to Embassy Paris for inclusion in post reporting.

¶9. (SBU) The APPs have proven to be powerful vehicles for building and strengthening relationships with regional officials and organizations who can help advance our public diplomacy and commercial objectives. Significantly enhanced relations with prefects, mayors, universities and chambers of commerce have flowed from APP activities, and these relations have improved the ability of Embassy Paris officers, and particularly the Ambassador, to reach quickly local officials and opinion leaders on matters of interest, including our global transformational diplomacy agenda.

¶10. (SBU) To ease the burden on the APPs' limited resources, periodic reports (F-77, Consular Package, Overseas School Reports, Human Rights Report, Religious Freedom Report, etc.) are handled almost exclusively by Embassy Paris. The Paris duty officer also handles all after-hours emergency calls for the APPs, although of course in a true emergency the Paris duty officer would then contact the APP officer.

¶11. (SBU) Embassy Paris provides most of the management support for the APPs. All vouchers, for example, are processed in Paris.

It would be erroneous, however, to conclude that APP staff spend little time on management issues. In the absence of a GSO, it is the APP staff themselves who must deal with the local telephone company, find repairmen to fix broken equipment, go to the store for supplies, and much more.

¶12. (SBU) PD Paris provides a large part of the speaker and cultural programs as "offers" to the APPs following bi-annual strategy sessions with the APPs. Adequate APP program support requires adequate personnel in Paris to handle this important country-wide program coordination. Overall PD budgets for posts with APPs should consider the increased program value of APP programming and reflect these additions in the basic PD personnel and program, including travel, budget planning for a post. Initially, the APPs were designed to handle only a small percentage of American citizen services, with Embassy Paris providing more complicated services such as prison visits, but today the APPs in France handle a wider range of citizen services. (There has been almost inevitable "mission creep" in this area as the APPs have become better established in their respective communities.)

¶13. (SBU) None of the APPs in France can send or receive telegrams (although they do have access with OpenNet hookups to Webgram and the ALDACs), and none of them handle any classified material. If a telegram needs to be sent, the officer e-mails the text to a Paris colleague.

Regular Consultation in Capital is Key

¶14. (SBU) Embassy Paris hosts a semi-annual Principal Officers Conference for APP and ConGen chiefs in April and October of each year. In addition, APP officers usually attend an in-country commercial and public diplomacy conference each year. These visits, as well as other occasional TDY visits to Paris, provide important opportunities to review Mission MPP goals, review common concerns/challenges and give these lone officers in the field the chance to meet key counterparts in the Embassy. A key benefit of these meetings is to enable the APP principal officers to share their "best practices" with one another -- a powerful learning tool, in our experience.

The APP "Model"...Not a Strait-Jacket

¶15. (SBU) One of the key concepts to keep in mind when developing an APP is the importance of flexibility. Mission needs, and personnel/budget realities loom large, as do regional differences between various APP sites. The five APPs in France each have only one American officer and share the same three principal missions, but are structured differently:

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APP Bordeaux has two local employees. One local employee covers both commerce and PD; the other covers both management and ACS.

APP Lille has one local employee who focuses primarily on commercial work, but who is not a Commerce Department employee. Since Lille is only one hour by train from Paris, a Paris-based local employee handles most of Lille's PD programming.

APP Lyon has four local employees. One is paid by the Commerce Department, one is paid out of PD funds, one focuses exclusively on ACS, and one is responsible for management and secretarial matters.

APP Rennes has two local employees. One covers PD, ACS, and management; the other focuses primarily on commercial work but is not a Commerce Department employee.

APP Toulouse has two local employees. One is paid by the Commerce Department; the other covers PD and ACS.

¶16. (SBU) As the above illustrates, there is not a specific "APP model" which should be copied - not even within France, where each of the five APPs was set up in response to regional specificities. (Rennes, for example, is home to France's largest regional daily, so APP Rennes tends to be more PD-focused. Toulouse is home to Airbus,

so APP Toulouse tends to focus more on commercial work. APP Lyon has a much larger American citizen "constituency," and is thus the only APP with a full-time ACS local employee.) Petty cash funds differ from post to post, as does the size of the territory covered. One shape and size does not fit all, whether inside France or elsewhere.

What Has Worked Well for APPs in France?

¶17. (SBU) Good communication is essential: communication of APP priorities, communication between APP chiefs and the Embassy, good communication links between the APPs and their State Department colleagues. (See next section for some of our lessons learned.)

¶18. (SBU) APPs look for synergies to help accomplish their goals. A day trip to an outlying city in an APP's "territory" can include a visit to an American company, meetings with local political figures, a media interview, a speech at a local school, and the provision of consular services to resident American citizens. During such a day, the officer may discover an International Visitor Program candidate, run across a potential distributor for American products, and inspire a class of French schoolchildren to set up an exchange program with a class of American schoolchildren.

¶19. (SBU) APP work relies heavily not only on synergy, but also on creativity. Maybe an APP cannot find a US speaker for an African-American History Month program, but knows a local university professor who has the appropriate background. Maybe the APP cannot present a medal to a former member of the French resistance who served as a truck driver with Patton's Third Army, but they can invite him to share his wartime experience with a group of American students.

¶20. (SBU) Each of the five APPs in France produces a monthly report highlighting key projects. Any readers interested in more detailed examples of "APP results" are invited to contact us using the e-mail address in the final paragraph of this telegram.

What Hasn't Worked So Well?

¶21. (SBU) The APPs originally attempted to rely strictly on commercial e-mail. However, Internet-only connections made coordination with other State Department colleagues difficult. The eventual connection (with adequate bandwidth) of the APPs to the State Department OpenNet system greatly improved matters, as well as providing access to an important array of OpenNet services, including Webgrams and ALDACs. We probably waited too long to dedicate the necessary funding to this issue, but our subsequent investment in adequate bandwidth has paid off. If post can fund adequate bandwidth and if local infrastructure permits, we believe that OpenNet is superior to an Internet-only connection.

¶22. (SBU) Because of France-specific circumstances, different APP activities are funded from State/PROG, State/PD and/or FCS budget resources. This has created some complications, as APPs and various fund managers sometimes have to sort through which expenditure is to be funded with which fund cite. If possible at post, a single funding source would reduce administrative burdens on both APP and Mission B&F staffs.

¶23. (SBU) Another ongoing issue that the APPs continue to struggle with is how to adjust USG accounting and control mechanisms to the small size of the posts, irrespective of where the funds originate. Management controls are of course necessary, but many of

the current requirements (such as some of the procedures for reporting petty cash expenditures, for being reimbursed for toll

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fees on short day trips, and for documenting use of the official vehicle) can be particularly cumbersome for such small posts. Embassy Paris has already put in place a number of innovative pilot programs to address some of these issues and continues to explore other possible approaches to ease the administrative burden.

Logistical Notes

¶24. (SBU) Consular services: All visa operations are centered in Paris, and none of the APPs issue emergency passports (due to the controls that would need to be put in place in order to protect blank passport covers). The APPs do, however, provide virtually all other citizen services (passport applications, reports of birth, notarial services, prison visits, mortuary certificates, etc.). Since the APPs have no ACS software, completed applications for passports and reports of birth are forwarded (after any oaths are taken) to AmEmb Paris or CG Marseille, who then enter cases in the ACS computer system, print the reports of birth (and death), etc. The APPs have no cashiers, so clients must pay by credit card or money order. No cash is accepted. Since the APP officer is often out of the office (either on official travel or at events), all APPs in France operate on a "by appointment only" system. Some APPs designate certain days as "consular days" and concentrate their ACS appointments on those days; others give appointments whenever the officer is available.

¶25. (SBU) Financial transactions: APP staff use a combination of petty cash and a government purchase card to handle most small financial transactions. For larger purchases and bills, the APP officer signs off on the initial bill and forwards it to the Embassy for payment.

¶26. (SBU) Office space: After an earlier failed experiment (in Lille) operating out of the officer's apartment, all APPs now lease commercial office space in buildings which have other offices also operating out of them. APP Lyon originally operated out of the Chamber of Commerce, an excellent arrangement in terms of easy access to key contacts.

¶27. (SBU) Ranks, titles, and privileges: All APP officers in France are at the 02 level and have the diplomatic title of Consul. For all intents and purposes, the French government treats the APPs as regular Consulates. APP officers do not receive ORE.

¶28. (SBU) Security: APPs are staffed by one local guard (with a backup guard available during the absence of the primary guard). The APPs have a hardline door that separates the exterior door from the interior offices, but once someone has cleared the initial security check, there is no separation between the visitor and the APP employees. Additionally, each APP is equipped with a Mailscan XRay unit for mail screening and a Walk Through Metal Detector (WTMD) for visitor screening. Obviously, what works in France -- a country with sophisticated security services and good cooperation with the U.S. and the U.S. Mission -- may not work similarly in other settings.

¶29. (SBU) Supervision: APP officers report to the Embassy Paris Economic Minister-Counselor, who serves as a liaison between the APPs and the many Embassy offices (especially the Commercial Service, Consular Affairs, Management, and Public Diplomacy) that have claims on the APP's time. The Paris DCM is their reviewing officer.

¶30. (SBU) Switchboards: The APPs do not have switchboard operators or receptionists. Instead, they use pre-recorded outgoing messages and voice mail when (as is often the case in such small posts) no one is in the office to answer the phone.

Things to Keep In Mind When Considering Establishing an APP

¶31. (SBU) The US Mission in France strongly believes that APPs are not just for France - the experience is certainly replicable in other countries. Certain factors, however, should be kept in mind when considering whether an APP is the appropriate choice in a particular country.

¶32. (SBU) Consular Commissions: If consular work is part of the APP's mandate, a current consular commission will be required for the American officer. Close coordination with CA is important to determine whether the officer has sufficient experience or requires

current training.

¶33. (SBU) Host country infrastructure: The APPs in France rely heavily on the French postal system, courier services, France Telecom, ATMs, and local internet and cellphone service providers. APPs in countries with less-developed infrastructures would need to be more creative (a necessity for any APP officer) about how they conduct business.

¶34. (SBU) Recruitment: It is vital that the American officer and
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the local employees be people who can work independently and who will do whatever it takes to get the job done, even if certain tasks do not appear in their job descriptions. An FSN-10, for example, may also be responsible for taking the official vehicle to the mechanic or for stuffing envelopes in advance of the 4th of July reception. The American officer must be willing not only to give speeches (which the officer often researches, writes, and translates on his or her own), but also to maintain the files, drive 2-3 hours (each way) to other cities on official business (often not returning until late at night), etc. Heavy evening, weekend, and holiday work is the norm. Fluency in the local language is crucial - outside the capital city, fewer contacts tend to speak English, and limited resources make it difficult for local employees to serve as interpreters. Virtually all of the APP officers' meetings, speeches, and media interviews are in French - someone without at least a 3/3 (preferably a 3+/3+) would be unable to meet the basic requirements of the job.

¶35. (SBU) Security: Security in the host country is one of the most important factors when considering whether to establish an APP. How reliable are the host country security services should there be an incident at the APP? How much of a threat exists against US interests in the host country? Does a Consul who drives an unarmored car with no guard incur an unacceptable risk given the host country's security environment? Competent local police and a stable security environment are critical to the success of an APP.

¶36. (SBU) Training: Given that APP officers and local employees cover such a wide range of activities, it is best to provide as much training (and consultation time) as feasible in both Washington and the capital city (crucial for developing relationships with Embassy colleagues upon whom the APP relies heavily) before an employee begins a job at an APP. Previous officers with limited commercial experience have found NFATC's export promotion and commercial diplomacy courses useful; the PAO training course is also an excellent introduction to PD resources. Cross training is also key for local employees, who back each other up when one or more are on leave.

APP Performance -- An OIG Assessment

¶37. (SBU) The Office of the Inspector General carried out an inspection of U.S. Embassy Paris in October and November 2004. This was the OIG's first opportunity to examine a well-established American Presence Post program. OIG findings are encouraging. To quote from the OIG summary (see oigweb.state.gov): QUOTE. Embassy Paris's innovative use of one-officer American Presence Posts in provincial regions have proven highly effective in promoting trade, conducting public diplomacy programs, and providing American citizen services at a relatively low costs. UNQUOTE.

APP Lessons Learned - France

¶38. (SBU) Based on Embassy Paris experience:

- Choose an APP mission that reflects the realities of limited staffing and resources.
- Avoid mission creep. A senior Embassy coordinator is helpful.
- Facilitate communications between APPs and capital, and among the APPs. France found this to be our single most valuable non-personnel investment.
- Recruitment, recruitment, recruitment. APP chiefs must be

adaptive, low-maintenance and versatile. Contact skills and language skills are key. This job is not for everyone.
-- Senior Embassy officials can be force-multipliers for the APP. Successive U.S. Ambassadors have made frequent visits a way to publicize and reinforce APP efforts locally.

What Resources Can the US Mission in France Offer Others Considering APPs?

139. (SBU) We are already supporting numerous visits by Department officials who are interested in seeing an APP "in action," and would be happy to organize similar visits with officers from Embassies who are considering establishing an APP in their host country. Another option would be for one of our APP officers or local employees to travel either to another post or to the Department (for example, in conjunction with a PAO conference or the COM conference) to give presentations on the APP concept.

140. (SBU) The US Mission in France would be pleased to respond to any additional queries concerning APPs, as well as to provide sample copies of the APPs' monthly reports. The point of contact for such inquiries is Embassy Paris Economic Minister-Counselor Thomas J. White at whitetj@state.gov and/or APP Lyon Principal Officer Angie Bryan, who can be reached at bryana@state.gov. Readers are also invited to consult the APP portions of the Embassy Paris website at www.amb-usa.fr.

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